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ABSTRACT

The disproportionate focus of sociologists on professional and managerial occupations distorts many generalizations about gender, employment, and family. Concentration on this occupational minority has led to such assumptions as the following: paid employment is the major life priority for men, and family is the major life priority for women; women lack high commitment to enter and succeed in higher level occupations while men have such commitment; men's work is more prestigious than women's work; and women are excluded from more desirable "men's jobs" while men avoid "women's jobs." The overemphasis on highly prestigious occupations has also probably led to less intensive study of the labor force in general. For example, we know very little about the reasons for the declining male employment. Much attention has been given to the question of why women work while little has been given to the parallel question for men. More research is needed on blue collar women and on men in traditionally female fields. By incorporating data based on the entire labor force, we can avoid the distortions based on studying high status occupations and strengthen the sociology of gender and the sociology of occupations. (LMS)

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ABSTRACT

It is proposed that the disproportionate focus of sociologists on professional and managerial occupations and occupational incumbants distorts many generalizations about gender, employment, and family. Existing data on declining labor force participation among men, the greater priority on family than employment reported by men on surveys, and the lack of research on issues such as men's labor force attachment, blue collar women, and men employed in traditionally "female fields" pose challenges to assumptions implicitly derived from a professionally oriented sociology of occupation and gender.

The study of occupations plays a central role in sociology. An individual's occupation is considered critical to self-definition, relations to political structure, familial orientation, and many other aspects of social life. This focus on occupations is reflected in journal articles. For example, one third of the American Sociological Review articles between 1973 and 1977 involved occupations in some form, such as occupational attainment, aspirations, mobility, or career styles.

Until the last decade, occupational research was nearly always about men, usually married men whose occupation was considered the primary determinant of familial status. The main issue concerning women and work was whether women were gainfully employed at all (e.g., Parsons, 1943; Acker, 1973; Oppenheimer, 1977).

The large increase of employed women following World War Two coupled with the recent feminist movement refocused attention on gender and occupations. The theoretical and empirical neglect of women has led many researchers to realize that a sociology of men was being conceptualized as a sociology of humanity and that reexamination of basic assumptions in the field was needed (e.g., Millman and Kanter, 1975). The structure of gender and work has occupied an important role in such reanalyses, since many theorists believe that the relations among women, men, and the economy are crucial to understand the importance of gender in areas such as the family or politics.

However, studies of gender and work--as studies of work more generally--are confined to a narrow range of issues. It is often emphasized that one's position in social structure influences theory, raising the debate about the viewpoint of "outsiders" in

creating social knowledge (e.g., Smith, 1974; Lee, 1976). As professionals, sociologists delight in studying either other professionals or high level managers similar in status to professionals. For example, 24 out of 34 (71 percent) occupations selected for intensive study in American Sociological Review articles between 1973 and 1977 were professional or managerial. Similarly, 65 percent (40 of 62) of the articles published in the first four years of Sociology of Work and Occupations studied either professionals or managers. Since only 28 percent of men and 22 percent of women were in these job categories in 1977 (Bureau of the Census, 1977: Table 660), this is a disproportionate focus indeed.

Studies of gender and occupations also concentrated on professional women, particularly in traditionally "male" professions (e.g., Epstein, 1970; Theodore, 1971). Only recently have sociologists begun to examine women in blue collar fields, service or clerical work, or the "occupation" of housework (e.g., Roby, 1975; Howe, 1977; Glazer, 1976). Studies of men in the "pink collar ghetto" of largely female occupations are very rare.

Certainly, it is important to study professionals and mangers, who have jobs with high prestige, high earnings, and much control over the working lives of others. However, concentration on this occupational minority has seriously distorted the meaning of occupations and the implications of occupation in other areas (such as the family). From this perspective has come assumptions such as the following:

> (1) Paid employment is the major life priority for men and family is the major life priority for women. Women's labor force attachment is "problematic" and must be "explained". Meanwhile, a strong labor force attachment is assumed for men (e.g., Parsons, 1943; David and Brannon, 1976).

(2) High degrees of commitment are required to enter and succeed in occupations. Because of family priorities, women are assumed to lack such commitments while men are assumed to possess them. Hence, we have a plethora of studies on "achievement motivation" (in male subjects) and suggestions that workers in low status occupations cannot delay gratification or lack internalized control (e.g., Atkinson, 1964; Coser and Rokoff, 1971; see Kanter, 1977 for a partial refutation of this literature).

(3) Men's work is more prestigeous than women's work. The prestige differential occurs in part because men are more committed to their occupations (e.g., Bernard, 1971).

(4) Women are excluded from more desirable "men's jobs" while men avoid "women's jobs". Control over exclusion enables men to appropriate more desirable and highly paid jobs for themselves (Snyder and Hudis, 1976; Szymanski, 1977).

This paper deals with such assumptions, juxtaposing them against findings that have been underemphasized in the literature on gender and occupations. I propose that the intensive focus on professionals and managers has led us to neglect interesting data that do not easily "fit" assumptions such as work as the major life priority for men. By incorporating data based on the entire labor force, we can avoid the distortions based on studying high status occupational incumbants, and strengthen both the sociology of gender and the sociology of occupations.

ISSUES RELATED TO OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION

Since the late 1960's, sociologists have become increasingly aware of gender segregated labor markets (e.g., Gross, 1968). These dual labor markets are supported by sex-typed occupational aspirations, educational segregation, and public attitudes (see Hesselbart, 1977 for a review). Gender segregation is highest in managerial occupations, clerical work, skilled crafts, many service occupations, and traditionally female professions such as nursing. Recent research indicates that occupational segregation

plays a major role in the paradox of approximately equal average prestige scores for both sexes, but much higher earnings for men (McLaughlin, 1977).

The traditional sociological emphasis that investments in education and the attainment of occupational prestige lead to higher earnings must be qualified when gender is introduced into occupational analyses. Census data indicate that predominantly male occupations in craft and operative work pay more than "feminine" professions, and far more than clerical work (Bureau of the Census, 1977: Table 662). Thus, male-oriented models of economic return to occupational investments may need considerable revision. Even when analyses are conducted separately for each sex, anomolies occur. For example, women coal miners have less education and occupational prestige than women secretaries, yet the former earn far more than the latter. However, miners are predominantly male while most secretaries are female. The percent female in an occupation is evidently an "investment" as well as education.

Professionally oriented models of occupational commitment and rewards (e.g., Coser and Rokoff, 1971) fail to explain why women do not attain positions that involve less skill but higher pay than in the occupations women do enter. For example, women are seldom found in craft work, entailing less training or commitment than professions such as teaching or nursing. Certainly, the skills in automotive assembly are as "replacable" as those in secretarial work.[1]

The control over exclusion and occupational avoidance assumptions are also usually viewed from a professional perspective,

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[1]The low level of women in craft work is sometimes explained by women's lack of physical strength (e.g., Ferriss, 1971). Cross-cultural data on women's participation in manual labor (e.g., Boserup, 1970) make this explanation an unlikely one.

although exclusion of women from male blue collar work is sometimes studied (e.g., Szymanski, 1977). Men are supposed to reserve desirable occupations for themselves but consciously avoid "women's work" either because the pay is low (Snyder and Hudis, 1976) or because of the stigma attached to "feminine tasks" (David and Brannon, 1976). However, limited data suggest that a "feminine" profession or clerical work can signify upward mobility to men from lower status families (Pavalko, 1965; Grimm and Stern, 1974). Because men's "avoidance" has been assumed, we still do not know how much gender segregation in predominantly female fields is due to subtle, but measurable resistance to men by women practitioners (Segal, 1962; Seifert, 1973) or employers (Levinson, 1975).

In order to present a full picture of relations between gender and occupations, the entire occupational spectrum must be considered: more research on factors supporting and the impact of occupational gender segregation; further studies of the comparative characteristics of women (and men) who enter traditionally male versus female blue collar employment; and more on the characteristics and outcomes of men who enter "feminine" occupations. This would only begin to match the many existing studies of the personality and demographic characteristics of women who enter professions such as engineering or medicine.

THE PARADOX OF PRESTIGE

One explanation of why men are assumed to avoid largely female occupations is because jobs held by women are often assumed less prestigeous than those held by men. For example, Bernard (1971) states that:

> By and large, occupations assigned to men tend to have more prestige than those assigned to women. Whatever men do, no matter what it is, has more prestige than what women do, even if it involves the same kind of decisions, requires the same amount of education, and deals with equally serious responsibilities (p. 113).

However, it has been found that the average occupational prestige of employed men and women is nearly identical (Featherman and Hauser, 1976, report representative results).

The paradox is resolved when the entire occupational spectrum is considered rather than only professional and managerial jobs. It is well known that women are concentrated in far fewer occupational categories than men. "Pink collar" jobs, such as secretary, tend toward the middle of prestige scales. Men are more likely to hold jobs both at the top and the bottom of the prestige hierarchy, resulting in the greater variance of prestige scores found for men than for women. "Pink collar" jobs also have a lower prestige "ceiling" and a higher "floor" than predominantly male occupations. Thus, the <u>averages</u> become the same.

However, among professional and managerial workers, women <u>do</u> enter less prestigeous occupations. Few women are managers in large corporations, positions which carry greater prestige than "cafe manager" or small retail store manager where women are more frequent. More prestigeous professions such as physician are predominantly male, while "women's" professions such as library science receive lower prestige ratings.

Experimental and survey research on gender and occupational prestige suggests that lower prestige scores for occupations that women enter are most likely to occur at professional and managerial levels. For example, Touhey (1974) found that the prestige ratings of predominantly male professions dropped when subjects were told

that the profession would have a large influx of women. Haug (1975) found that largely female professions received lower prestige scores than largely male professions, especially by males and upper status respondents. However, Bose (1973) reported that a wide variety of occupations in an experimental treatment with women's name attached to the occupation received nearly identical prestige scores to occupations with men's name attached. Bose did find that occupations with large numbers of women received lower prestige scores only among the most prestigeous of all occupations. While more research is needed, "women's work" seems to lose prestige only at the top of the occupational ladder.

The studies cited above have not gone unchallenged. It has been suggested that the selective recruitment of highly skilled women into the labor market artificially inflates the occupational prestige scores of employed women. Women with more education and more desirable job opportunities may be more likely to enter the labor force than their poorly skilled sisters, and the jobs these "selective" women enter have higher prestige. Bose (1973) suggests the comparatively high prestige score for occupation "housewife" compared with other predominantly female occupations might be one motivation for poorly skilled women to avoid labor market employment.

Fligstein and Wolf (1977) refer to the issue of selective recruitment and retention of highly skilled women in the labor force as a "censoring problem". However, their empirical analysis of employed persons suggests that "censoring" is not an important bias in estimates of women's occupational prestige. It is also important to note (see below) that a similar, although neglected,

censoring phenomenon may occur for men.

The problems faced by professional and managerial women should not be underestimated, since considerable research documents discrimination against them. Nor, as we have seen earlier, does equal prestige mean equal earnings for women and men. However, the focus on professionals of both sexes have led to some generalizations (such as on prestige) about the entire labor force that are probably incorrect. The overemphasis on highly prestigeous occupations has also probably led to less intensive work on labor force attachments among both women and men.

LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND MEN

> The proposal to raise to 70 the age at which a person can get a maximum Social Security check was made by the desk set, whose hardest job is making it to the water cooler and back to their desks.
>
> Where are all these jobs that people want to work at till the day they die? And where are all these people whose interests are so narrow that they want to die on the job?
>
> So-called love for the job and the position one holds is frequently nothing but a mask to conceal mental lethargy... Retirement at 65 is like the quality of mercy...
>
> (letters to Time from three men, October 31, 1977)

The concentration on the meaning of work to professional men, the emphasis on such concepts as "achievement motivation", and statements that women want "jobs" while men want "careers" are ironic when labor force rates over the past few decades are examined. The attention toward the growing civilian labor force (CLF) participation of women is far from matched in attention paid to the declining CLF rates of men. The familiar figures for women tell us that female CLF participation was about 25 percent in 1910, a statistic that remained roughly constant until 1940, rising thereafter to about 48 percent in 1977. By contrast, men's

CLF participation was 91 percent in 1910, a figure that fell to 77 percent by 1977 (Bureau of the Census, 1953: Table 205; 1977: Table 627).

We know very little about declining male employment. Longer school years among youth in recent years are a minor factor. For example, 81 percent of men aged 16 to 24 in 1920 were in the CLF, a figure only slightly higher than the 76 percent for the same age group in 1976 (see Census sources above, also Bureau of the Census, 1977: Table 626). Retirement among older men is a large factor. The Time letters are mirrored in declining rates for men at least 65 years old (from about 46 to 19 percent between 1950 and 1976) and those between the ages of 55 and 64 (from 85 percent in 1960 to 74 percent in 1976; Bureau of the Census, 1970: Series D29-41; 1977: Table 626). In 1976, 43 percent of non-CLF men reported that retirement was their major reason for non-labor force participation (Bureau of the Census, 1977: Table 631).

On the average, black men were about six years younger than white men in 1976; thus, age structure seems an unlikely reason for black men to leave the labor force more than white men. Nevertheless, between 1960 and 1977, CLF rates declined more for black than for white men. Figures for nonwhite and "all" men were nearly identical in 1960 (about 84 percent). By 1977, only 71 percent of nonwhite versus 77 percent of "all" men were in the CLF (Bureau of the Census, 1977: Table 627).

Additionally, married men are more likely than nonmarried men to be employed. The marriage effect is not an artifact of age differences among marital status categories. For example, in 1970, CLF rates for currently married, previously married, and single men

aged 55 to 64 were respectively 85 percent, 65 percent, and 60 percent (Kreps and Clark, 1975).

Age, race, and marriage generally summarize the limited knowledge about male CLF participation. Given some speculation, these statistics lend a hand to the irate men who wrote to Time. Older black men have less education than younger or white men, and are more likely to occupy jobs involving physical exertion, monotony, and "dirty work". Married men also have more education, and higher prestige occupations (Carter and Glick, 1976). The necessary steps in a complete model linking age, race, and marital status to such achieved characteristics as education or income, then to variables such as work alienation, then to labor force attachment are not yet accomplished, although partial links using only male data exist in the literature on stratification and work alienation. Certainly, such a model comparing men and women is not yet available. Until such research is done, we have only sketchy and speculative information about demographic and other correlates of labor force attachment for both sexes. Obviously, much work remains yet unaccomplished.

If it is the case that men at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy are "dropping out", one potential implication could be an artifical upgrading over time of the status of men who do remain in the CLF. That is, with the CLF loss of poorly skilled men, who are self/other defined as "too old" for paid employment (even in their 50s), the percent of men in professional, managerial, and other white collar work would automatically increase. A more thorough investigation of "censoring" in the labor market for both sexes over time appears warrented.

WHY DO MEN WORK AT ALL?

This question may seem ridiculous to students of gender and occupations. Evidently so, since we have neglected to ask such a question. Literally hundreds of studies and thousands of social science report pages have been devoted to the parallel question for women. Perhaps not surprisingly, it is repeatedly found that women report seeking or holding employment for either financial or self-fulfillment reasons. What is surprising is that so much has been made of the question for women and so little attention is paid to the parallel question for men.

The data on men's CLF declining rates suggest that such a question is long overdue. Comparisons of both sexes' responses would allow us to see how variables influencing occupational opportunity (such as education), familial support pressures, and other issues are similar or different in their impact on men's and women's CLF attachment. Similarities that are found will enable us to avoid viewing women's employment as a "problem" and focus more attention on factors relevant to employment in the entire population. Differences that occur will give needed knowledge on gender and work.

It could be argued that many studies already exist about work alienation and job satisfaction among men (e.g., see Robinson, et al., 1969 for a partial review). Note, however, that such studies assume that men are already attached to the labor force and that this is a "natural" role for men. Contrast such assumptions with those that stress that family is the major priority for women, thus making women's CLF attachment a "problem" to be investigated and explained.

GENDER, WORK, AND FAMILY

Perhaps the most important assumption with which this paper began concerned the relative priorities of work and family for each sex. It has long been argued that women's primary devotion to family precludes long-term career commitment. Potential status competition between spouses has also been proposed as a reason for women's lower labor force attachment, "prestige", and earnings (Parsons, 1943, but see Oppenheimer, 1977). Men's greater priorities on occupation have been seen as serving the family and society. From economic necessity and "moral imperative", the man becomes the family breadwinner and status representative to the larger community. His internal familial commitments become "secondary roles" (e.g., Clark, et al., 1978).

However, this important assumption about the greater attachment of men to occupation than family has only been implicitly tested, e.g., in comparing labor force rates or time spent in housework. Most family research studies women as either respondents or "research problems" and the literature has not progressed greatly beyond what has been called "wives' family sociology" (Safilios-Rothschild, 1969). Only recently has housework been conceptually disentangled from "housewife" (e.g., see Glazer, 1976) and only recently have companionship for men in the family and the behavior of fathers who live with their children received attention (Lynn, 1974; Campbell, et al., 1976). Ironically, given the many survey questions concerned about whether employed mothers neglect their children, we have no survey questions about whether employed fathers neglect their children.

Nevertheless, scattered survey data suggest that both men and

women place a greater value on family life than on their occupations. Taken together, these data indicate that traditional assumptions about the valued priorities of men and women need revision.

For example, a 1940 Gallup poll reported that 68 percent of respondents chose a "happy home" over an "interesting job" or "wealth"[2]. In 1971 Gallup data, both sexes spontaneously mentioned that a happy family was more important than a congenial job or employment (Erskine, 1973). Nearly identical proportions of male and female youth in a national survey (Institute of Life Insurance, 1974) rated a happy family life as more important than a fulfilling career. In another national adult sample (Roper, 1974), a majority of men and women felt a happy marriage was more important for daughters and sons than an interesting career or financial success (although a happy marriage was stressed more for daughters). Finally, the Campbell, et al. (1976) "quality of life" survey found few sex differences in satisfactions with family or work, and marriage and family life were rated as "more satisfying" than occupational issues.

Given traditional assumptions, research on the relative importance of family and occupations to both sexes is rare. The various life options open to individuals and how these relate to life priorities and satisfactions need further attention. For example, Clark, et al. (1978) found that husbands with higher educations or incomes participated less in housework and were potentially less accessible to listen to their wives' problems.

[2] These responses were not analyzed by gender. Given the later studies cited and the overwhelming "family" response, it is likely that men as well as women ranked a happy family first.

However, contrary to stereotypes that high status husbands place low priorities on family life, highly educated and high income husbands were most likely to participate in family recreational activities. Men at different stages of the life cycle also deserve further study. Preliminary data suggest that young married childless men are more satisfied with family life, and more satisfied with family than job (Campbell, et al., 1976; Harry and Doherty, 1975).

In order to interpret these data, we must know more about what a "happy family" and family satisfaction mean to men. Data consistently show that "family" for men means neither housework nor routine childcare. Possibly, the expressive rewards of playing with children (e.g., Lynn, 1974; Lamb, 1977), spousal companionship, or the greater mental health of married men (e.g., Gove and Tudor, 1973) are factors which make men value their families highly.

Despite the potential ambiguity of these survey data, they should not be lightly dismissed. Certainly, these surveys challenge the idea that family is a "secondary" valued role for men. The interconnections between family and employment have been heavily investigated for women (especially professional women) without the important comparison group of men. Without more comprehensive theory and research, it seems plausible that men and women are more similar than different in their familial and work goals.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper began by proposing that an overemphasis on high level occupations could lead to distortions about the relationships between gender and occupations. Factors such as gender differences in work attachment and commitment, the "greater priority" of

work above family for men, and the greater occupational prestige of men were proposed to be findings more common and exaggerated among those in high level occupations than elsewhere in the occupational system. This does not deny the seriousness of such issues for professionals or managers. Nor is this paper trying to "prove" that the sexes are identical in work or family or other social settings. Rather, the point is that much potentially useful data have been ignored or underemphasized--or that fruitful research questions have not even been investigated--and that this has occurred in part because sociologists have chosen to intensively study male and female professionals and managers.

The small (although growing) literature on blue collar women and on men in traditionally female fields prevents sociologists from obtaining a complete picture of gender and occupations. The scarcity of research on male CLF attachments, and the possible connection of such attachments with status factors may bias estimates of male occupational prestige and occupational distributions, especially in comparisons over time. The secondary priority which men place on family life also deserves more skeptical research.

These issues only scratch the surface of a more complete research reanalysis of gender and occupations. They are, however, issues that need to be incorporated into theory and research. Given the postulated importance of gender and work for gender and other social institutions, nothing less than a full investigation into the work worlds of women and men will do.

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